THE FUTURE OF FUTURISM

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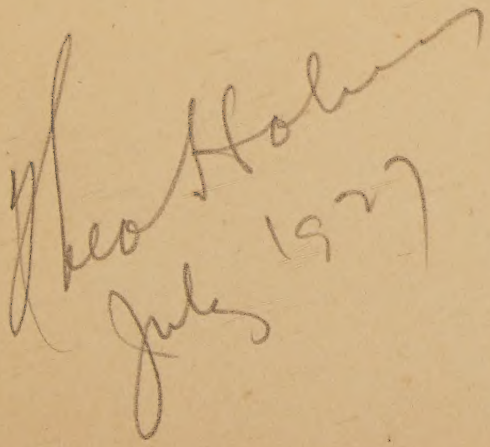
THE FUTURE OF FUTURISM



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" . . . like the fortuitous encounter on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella."

I

Introductory

Of Futurism so much has been said in the past fifteen years that, with a country very much divided on the subject of Mr Epstein's Rima, some belated definition seems necessary.

But to call that work Futurist, as the Press does, rather than Archaic,

[1] From a definition of Cubism: "Mais il est incontestablement l'effort artistique qui en étant le plus important de notre époque, y a apporté le plus de confusion."

Negro, or South American, traces of all of which influences it may be seen to bear, is to say nothing; for the misleading word does not in this case deal with the Future, but much with the Past. Indeed, primitive and savage motifs are not least important in what we know as Futurism. Thus a first confusion arises in the popular mind; the menace of continuity implied by the word is a second.

In our generation Marinetti, an Italian, first perceived the arts to be undergoing some similar change, and with certain exaggerations the poets, painters, and musicians he grouped round him exemplified such changes. What excitement was provoked by his manifestoes and exhibitions proved that there was in most places a reaction

from the Romanticism of the preceding generation; that a new Romanticism of machinery, towns, violence was taking its place. War seemed its logical outcome, and, as was to be expected, became its extinguisher. But war could not entirely put back the clock, as the academies had hoped; while in some ways the revolutions accompanying war gave a wider tolerance. But Marinetti's first avatar left behind the generic term, and Futurism may now mean almost any unconventional activity in the contemporary arts, whether Vorticist, Cubist, Symbolist, Vers Librist, etc.

To-day, if writing is called Futurist, it is generally because words or ideas are found in free association. Cubism, too, whether good or bad, is

called Futurism (though we hear of Braque in 1908), as is in some quarters a sort of Spirit-drawing; while in music Stravinsky has been claimed, which he cannot be if Pratella is. So that for vagueness it would be difficult to find a better term. But generally the word will include all those artistic activities called revolutionary by the academies, incomprehensible by the man in the street.

That certain changes have taken place, changes seemingly peculiar to this generation, a quotation from Mr Goossens will show:

". . . the odd score of years . . . to the present day, have been more pregnant with revolutionary consequences to our art than any previous period in its history. Music . . . took

on a new lease of life in the hands of . . . men . . . who . . . discarding all the worn conventions . . . of the past, embarked on a series of experiments and innovations which . . . dealt the death-blow to old traditions . . ."

And Guillaume Apollinaire writing in 1912 said of painting:

"The secret aim of the young artists of the extreme schools is to produce pure painting. It is an entirely new plastic art. It is still in its first stages and is not yet as abstract as it would like to be. Most of the young painters work a great deal with mathematics without knowing it, but they have not yet abandoned nature, whom they patiently question so that she may teach them the way of life. . . . The

painters have been led quite naturally and so to speak by intuition to pre-occupy themselves with possible new measures of space which in the language of modern studios has been designated briefly and altogether by the term the fourth dimension. . . ."

That mathematical pre-occupation has lately touched all the arts in some degree. In music Schoenberg, whom Mr Goossens fears is almost too mathematically precise to be of great creative significance, and in Literature Miss Stein, to whom we shall turn later.

But a so-called mathematical bias suddenly appearing in all the arts implies some inquiry into the properties of the units involved, and actually in the case of Futurism it was the mate-

rial and abstract qualities of the constants or fundamentals of the arts, and their mutual repercussion, which, it may be assumed, some attempt was being made to record and systematize.

That was a very natural reaction, for the arts had so long wandered in the mazes of symbolism, that they had grown completely out of touch with that world which it was their function to interpret, a world which every day grew more mechanical, expressing a new fluidity in an infinity of geometric and rigid shapes. At the artist's side the scientist took seven-leagued strides. That turned him in emulation to something which would be analogous to the scientist's measuring sticks and instruments of precision, hoping to find thereby some fool-proof foun-

dation for all his future structures.

He perceived also, and for the first time, that the centuries had accumulated about him as though casually—a vast wealth of primitive forms and decoration. The first shock over, their rhythms were soon incorporated into his practice. But that was perhaps the last important decorative possibility to be tapped, and we imagine no such rich mine remains to be discovered. And it is possible that with the final exploiting of those influences and their final incorporation, the skeleton of the arts will be permanently fixed, though future elaborations grow never so fine.

I should therefore like now to dismiss the general problem which this title raises, and leave the arts of paint-

ing and music which are somewhat difficult to illustrate without examples, and confine myself to Literature about which everyone knows something, and the future of which should roughly illumine the other arts; and if we choose say A.D. 3000 as an approximate date, that will leave us plenty of room to turn round in.

II

Possible Changes in the Make-up of Humanity

Mr Wells gives us a number of comprehensive but disturbing visions of posterity. Your libraries will turn on the speaking romances of that day, while other switches will fill the empty picture frame with any abstract arrangement of the units supplied, not omitting stage-noises, rustle of leaves, murmur of water, and battery of pastoral sounds. These possibilities charm us, but if man has not by then overcome his instinct for nosing out overtones, volatilizing essences, he

will find himself unhappily very much where now he finds himself, with his insuperable problems of soul, sex, etc., for we assume he will still yearn for an ultimate resolution of all his problems in some near future.

It is possible, however, that, before even so much happens, men may acquire a new sense or two, and with them new standards; but that seems unlikely, and with the best will in the world it is impossible to guess on what lines they would develop or if the arts would be thereby affected.

And, though the airman is said to be growing a new kind of mind, as if like a bird, his spiritual skeleton grew hollow and could soar, and though life in submarines may cause profound organic changes, yet the expression of

these activities has so far meant nothing more than a slight alteration in the hæmoglobin index and additional bric-a-brac to the what-not of the arts.

However, there has not been time enough for these vocations to modify deeply the minds of those engaged in them, but perhaps the mind itself is incapable of a transition commensurate with our taking to the air and the depths of the sea. Unless of course the change in atmospheric pressure stimulates some gland to renewed activity and a recrudescence of primitive impulses, in place of the highly refined ones to which we look forward. So that in all this we have no ground for assuming any amelioration, and certainly not from the exactly opposite fact that, while the possibilities of

experience grow every day more common, the average use of words, far from widening with them, grows always more restricted.[1]

Indeed, if words had any vitality to-day, their reduction in number would be a source of strength (as we are accustomed to think all simplicity is), yet, instead, we seem to see about us the deliquescence of all non-specialized thinking, and are left with the greater part of writing, as perhaps the most conservative of the arts, no better than the literature of the past taken at whatever point. That is not strange, for writing concerns itself with what it would have stable factors

[1] From this one need not deduce that the feelings are similarly impoverished. Indeed, man's present-day inarticulateness seems an added irritant to his sensibility.

in mankind, the emotions, and where the reactions to these may be changed or modified, i.e. jealousy, most writers find it pays better and is more generally satisfactory to give them their full primitive value. In such works, therefore, the man of to-day is ready to be, and is perhaps even proud of being, on a par with his fellows of the stone age!

For the rest, it would seem that the best artistic expression has always been about equal to itself, that there has been no advance, no retrogression (there have of course been periods and places in which the arts were totally occluded), and if our problem were, is Futurism better or will it be better, this essay could now end, for

we might be sure that the best work of any future time could not rank higher than the best work of to-day or of the past (though the whole world must be our province), and that what possibilities of permanence such work had, would lie in the possession of certain qualities mankind in the past has agreed to call classical; but from our modern use of the word we could not honestly exclude either savage art, cubist painting, the literature called subjective, or minor poetry.

In fact, the time has come to widen our definition of the classical, for futurism only exists as a state of flux, immediately it is accepted becoming the classical of its own generation and of posterity. Picasso for example in

painting, Stravinsky in music, and in Literature let us say Joyce.[1]

We are not however concerned with the definition of what elements make the classical, or with those transitory elements which in A.D. 3000 will go to make some new school with the thirty-year life of a school, for a subsequent generation would be bound to react from it.

But the present condition of man's mind and its possible mutations does interest us, and the possibility of new inventions to keep his mind spongy and promise wider horizons. But in

[1] But Joyce is not, never has been, a Futurist. And the term cannot be applied to Literature, for such experiments as have been made in the free association of words (the only formula comparable with an abstract painting) and which were mainly anonymous and pre-War, are of little importance.

effect he takes, and may go on taking, most things for granted; and, like an aborigine surrounded by every marvellous contrivance, will still keep sacred his taboos and ceremonial gear. And like that world which is ransacked daily for those new tastes in which he finds so much medieval virtue, so everything which the mad scribbling child humanity has set down must find its billet in some mind. It is impossible to tell the truth so that it is understood and not be believed, said Blake, but to-day, in the general slackening of all standards, truth, however much understood, has less moral force than it ever had. So that, although some individual be affected to raving point or another utterly blasted, the mass has no use for it, and writing,

searching for an absolute truth, goes on at the side of all other activities but influencing them less and less.

Yet though man is unconscious of the more obvious attacks of that civilization in which he lives, secretly and by various inappreciable influences his life does seem to be changing. Imperceptible in one generation, it is marked in two. Twenty generations and the possibilities are immense. It seems to me that the pettifogging clerk of St Petersburg in roughly the year 1870, the Slavonic contribution to the literature of the Universe, is the most important indication of the direction Humanity must take. For it is his self-questioning, his doubts, his innocence, and his general incompetence, absent till then from literature and so pre-

sumably non-existent, which more and more will be translated into what we now call soul. When Dostoievsky said: "For humanity's daily needs, mere ordinary human sensibility ought to suffice, or about one-half or one-quarter of the sensibility which falls to the lot of the average educated man of this miserable 19th century," he had given humanity an enormous push along the road it was bound to travel. For, though Rousseau and then Restif de la Bretonne had as if fearfully taken the first step or two in the path of extreme sensibility and the natural man, they could not suspect that the unnatural man was to be a thousand times more sensitive, more tortured, and that the conditions of modern life would encourage that morbidity. With

them the path was closed until Dostoievsky pushed a way through.[1]

That this influence is not peculiar to literature, the following quotation from Mr Goossens will show:

"Finally we come to what is perhaps the most influential school and one more fraught with possibilities of expansion than any to-day, that of Russia; with which we immediately associate the names of two of the most remarkable composers of all time, Stravinsky and Scriabin. . . ."

[1] As to the factors that made this sensibility, they are too many to be capable of adequate definition; and, since it is now-a-days to be found among all classes, is not likely to be due to degeneracy resulting from the mixing of strains, as has been suggested. That, however, may be a contributing cause, and now that the races of Europe mix and intermarry on a large scale—if not actually—certainly as far as fashions, customs, and food go, we may expect sensibility to become everywhere exacerbated.

So that the real hunt for the soul may perhaps be said now to have begun. Legions of writers between this and the year 3000 will earnestly till that field, and there can be no doubt that the complexities of Dostoievsky's characters, not to mention Tchekhov, are about to descend upon these shores, indeed have descended; from whence they will spread and in that order to America, Australia, Africa, and Canada.[1]

Will man, then, following some super-Tchekhov always go one better, or imagine he is so doing, and shall

[1] It is to be regretted that Dostoievsky has been made the excuse for much of the temperament and lack of balance in various individuals in this country in the last twenty years. The simple and touching romanticism of these islands found rich aliment in the great Russian and revealed unsuspected possibilities to what was always the most romantic race in Europe.

we see him more nerve-racked, his physical difficulties almost solved but his emotional problems insuperable? How could he realize the necessity of combating them, in a world which has no use for his masculine reactions, the liens which hold him conditioned by none but feminine standards. Our literature, our newspapers, are so filled with the feminine (naturally, when all writing is, has been, by men) and its reactions analysed in such detail, that insensibly these have now become our standards; and to-day it is that vision of the romantic, those yearnings, which dictate the outlook of whole nations. So, that, with to-day's preponderance of women, a vast revolution may be seen to be taking place,

the gratification of the senses monopolizing all activity.

That finds its expression in the time-honoured chimpanzee game of poking some distracted insect (retired laundryman, miserly bookseller, virgins and dangerous ages) out of its hole with a straw. But with the perfecting of a mechanical world, mankind must assuredly react from so insulting a pre-occupation. That this is already happening is obvious from the advertisements, so prevalent in America and now beginning to appear here, which offer to free the subject from what is called Halitosis and other smells.

So that the time was ripe for Apollinaire and his: "The modern school

seems to me the most audacious that has ever been. It has put the question of what is beauty.[1] It wishes to visualize beauty disengaged from the pleasure which man causes man and since the dawn of historic times no European artist has dared to do that."

Unhappily it would seem that so far man cannot dissociate himself from the problems set him by that world from which he has abdicated; problems susceptible of infinite analysis, while ever remoter strata of consciousness remain to be tapped. Nor can we say there is a bedrock beyond which his sensibility cannot go, much as we should like to close this particular avenue of to-morrow's literature about

[1] For beauty the reader must substitute "a work of art."

the year 2500. Yet before then the pendulum must several times swing back to the innocence of the amœba.

As to the various schools I have already mentioned, Vorticist, Imagist, etc., it must not be forgotten that they do represent quite definite qualities of the mind, and that it would be easy to find equivalents for them in the past. Literature in the future therefore cannot but contain similar elements, so that our revolution does not lie in this direction.

III

Literary Possibilities

But then we ask ourselves: What literary aliment will posterity seek? Will its literature be a free association of words or of ideas, or will words be built up in mechanical exercises like the fugue, or into geometric figures, the calligram; or will they be matched with each other for colour and weight; Mallarmè and his: "Oui, la literature existe, et si l'on veut, a l'exclusion de tout," or will the bias be towards a naturalistic writing; then will the refinements of a Tchekhov transcribe remoter vibrations of the individual

and Dostoievsky's hysteria, his Rubens canvas, its welter of blood and tears, seem some schoolboy's exercise; or, if the bias be prophetic, will the symbolism of a super-Blake, wrapped in deeper silence, more distant and more dazzling, be equally obscure to posterity's subtler minds?

Or will humanity live in a purely documentary world, tolerating only the adventures of Nick Carter, the Locus Solus of Roussel (the richest and most mechanical of worlds this), *Faits Divers* from the newspapers of 1925, mad-house lucubrations, advertising matter, and the dreams of children, all standard units of the house of literature?

IV

Attempts to Revitalize the Language

But while words grow weaker, their outlines vaguer, their repercussion on the mind is of such a nature that from time to time some attempt is bound to be made to weight them and restore their primitive value. No one would accuse Guillaume Apollinaire of inventing his calligrams for the purpose of casting spells, nor have the mantrams of Miss Stein,[1] we imagine, any

[1] Mr. Wyndham Lewis says of her: "Miss Gertrude Stein is the best known exponent of a literary system that consists in a sort of gargantuan mental stutter. What she is exploit-

other motive than to grow and flower exactly as she wishes them to grow and flower. Her words are arranged not so much in free association, for their relation is obvious, but as though they were units and interdependent, and they are developed in recurring motifs as a fugue might be developed or a house built up of standard units. But it is an extravagant method and the amount of material involved quite astounding. Her latest book will contain some thousand pages in the manner of the quo-

ing in her method is the process of the demented. For any one less strong-minded than Miss Stein this might prove a dangerous operation . . . Her art is composed, first of repetition which lyricises her utterances on the same principle as that of Hebrew poetry. But the repetition is also in the nature of a photograph of the unorganized word dreaming of the mind when not concentrated on some logical functional purpose."

tation I give later. Such a method may prove some sort of discipline for a mind debauched (?) by too much compressed literature and the "mot juste." (How far this last consideration removes us from the late strenuous generation is not to be measured in words.) As for asking that the method be refined, and a more essential oil extracted for posterity, it is possible someone may invent an even more repetitive manner. Then it must not be forgotten, that many people ask specially for 'long books,' and this would seem to be an admission of the hypnotic value of repetition.

Miss Stein says:

"There are often two of them, both women. There were two of them, two women. There were two of them,

both women. There were two of them. They were both women. There were two women and they were sisters. They both went on living. They were very often together then when they were living. They were very often not together when they were living. One was the elder and one was the younger" . . .

But at the other end of the scale we have Mr. Cummings:

. . . "as usual I did not find him in cafés, the more dissolute atmosphere of a street superimposing a numbing imperfectness upon such peregrinations as twilight spontaneously by inevitable tiredness of flanging shopgirls impersonally affords furnished a soft first clue to his innumerable whereabouts" . . . and this might

more definitely help us in our search for the language of posterity though not its thoughts, for given the author's necessity to express this complicated relation it would be impossible to say it more clearly and compactly, yet keep its atmosphere. And it is possible that as Mr. Cummings[1] has grown out of the conventional manner in which his admirable novel, the "Enormous Room" is written, so perhaps posterity too may begin to think and speak in a similar way and may develop similar forms for the expression of the qualifying mazes of its adjectives, a problem which much preoccupied the later Henry James and to-day Mr. Joyce. Thus it may entirely displace the simple

[1] Mr. Cummings is an American poet.

grammatical constructions of to-day and make much of our present writing appear mere baby talk, as indeed Tennyson and Longfellow already seem; by whom thoughts and emotions of the very simplest degree of complexity were expressed in words of one syllable.

V

Help from the French and the Necessity for Abstractions

As for the quotation with which this essay begins: "above all like the fortuitous encounter on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella," it is a very dry sentence but one which has given much pleasure to some minds. In essence it is a development of the descriptions of scenery which began to appear in literature as a result of the agglomeration of men in towns (the countryman being blind to what we call the beauties of nature), but this particu-

lar point of view is, we think, more intelligent and capable of much wider development. And if we look at the trend of certain latter aspects of writing, it may fairly safely be assumed that this 'still life' indicates an important development in the future of letters; though the image we hope will be more subtle, the leap more daring. The phrase however, a vague definition would be prophetic, is not particularly a French discovery though the passage quoted is from that language, for we have had, and may again have, writers with similar gifts and equally intense illumination.

But whereas that form of utterance has been spasmodic here, where for the moment it has no representative, in France to-day the many imitations

of its devotees does not by much approach the admired masters, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Lautrèamont, Mallarmè. That does not condemn, nor suggest any impossibility of the further development of the method, which, undreamt of before the beginning of the last century, differs from other writing in that it is not concerned with the exhalations of humanity a more or less complete catalogue of which the reader will find later, but is an arrangement of forms analogous to an abstract painting and dependent on qualities which do not trade on the emotions. The baser instincts play only a minor part.

In the past, inspired writers have occupied themselves with man, damning him, exalting him, in the finest,

most moving passages of literature, but they have never made the abstract activities of the mind and senses the field for their search. Yet there we have a possibility of more permanently satisfying ravings taken out of their all too human contexts. As we shall grow more refined, our nervous antennæ more delicately aware of new vibrations, all the invisible gamut of the spectrum should open to us, the image grow more daring and take a wider sweep.

But at the same time and within the same limits we shall have a directly contrary literature. It will occupy itself with the minutest variations; its descriptions will be the slow motion film of writing. The deliberate dropping stars of the tiny parachute

in the Naples aquarium will be taken in detail, caught at each momentary iridescent flash; or the detail of every least irregularity of some seemingly perfect surface analysed as far as human ingenuity will take it. Thus too some perfect picture of the Universe may be obtained.

Then, we must have a literature, very large, very slow, like the development of one of Brancusi's [1] forms, which, under a mask of immobility, will epitomize all activity.

And then, since literature is inconceivable but as a mirror of ourselves, 5,000 years will have saturated us, so that we must turn elsewhere. But, whichever way we turn, however cos-

[1] Brancusi. A Roumanian sculptor living in France.

mic our outlook, however limited, so far we have been brought hard up against ourselves. So we must hope that the phrase with which we started may grow wings, sweep wider, climb higher, though we cannot now follow it, and passing the peaks of Donne, Blake, Mallarmè, Roussel, drop boldly into that abyss on the brink of which these and other writers must have felt themselves hovering, to return with some earnest of that El Dorado.

It may be a stone, a gas, water of Styx, it matters not if only our descendants can somehow get away from themselves and the god in their own image.[1]

[1] Cf. Blake's definition of the most sublime poetry. "Allegory addressed to the intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the corporeal understanding.

VI

The Russian Influence

By far the most important forces, however, which while not being inimical to each other, may possibly diverge, are the names I have mentioned on the one hand and on the other Dostoievsky and Tchekhov. In a way the immense calm of Tolstoi may be said to bridge both streams but I do not feel we shall hurriedly find another Tolstoi, though from time to time the continually diverging streams may be bridged by ever greater writers.

Yet the Russians are a puzzle with

their contribution to the sensitivity of the world, for their own introspection it is said is due to white nights and long winter months spent on the stove; things undreamt of elsewhere. And as it is one of the latest European countries to be economically developed we cannot guess what flying, the railway and the telegraph may do to the race. So that here it must be the very instincts we deprecate which speak between them and us, progress passing through the spirit. For now we have been shown the way, we recognize ourselves as complicated and as hysterical as the best writing can make us.

For conditions will grow every day more stable, man will begin to think more of his soul and its place in the

world, our engineers' world of the future should produce an immense hysterical self-consciousness.[1]

There we have the best of all reasons for constructive propaganda by the State and there is no doubt the way is being prepared for it, for introspection has always, and justly, been regarded as morbid and contrary to its best interests. And looking at America on the one hand and Russia on the other, it must now be obvious that the very near future will see the complete automatism of the individual in a benevolent state, manufacturing minds.

That must bring its own reaction. Writing, the arts, taking to the hills.

[1] Religion and the struggle for existence must have much simplified the general outlook of the majority in the past.

So we shall have writers writing for each other in a tongue of which Mr Cummings is the vaguest forerunner. Then the earnest student will find himself crawling painfully among weighty exegeses, the whole business of the arts a priestly hierarchy of infinitely various degrees.[1]

[1] All this I shall be told has already happened in China, art has bloomed, and faded; its wisdom not wise enough to avoid the general scramble for the benefits of European civilization, and the consequent scrapping of its own institutions. But was it not rather that it had reached the final limit at which men may communicate and understand each other and that no further development in those directions was possible, apart from the inventing of the new language we plead for?

VII

A Plea for Agility

I said earlier that the literature, and indeed all the arts of the future, might call for the exercise of greater agility than we use to-day, and indeed, no one looking at the writing of the younger Frenchmen could at all doubt that the bias which the last seventy years has shown in that direction in France, above all in poetry, though I shall not attempt to define either poetry or prose, is not only a definite contribution to Literature, but is also applicable to all the arts; being the discovery of a path mankind is bound

to take, though such is the astringent quality of the wind that sweeps the channel, that so soon as such manifestations of the spirit reach these shores they are known as Futurist.[1]

And here I must apologize for this continued reference to France, but it is the only country where the arts are practised in schools, and not as in England, in a sort of Thebaïd by the

[1] Stendhal says somewhere that genius loses 40 per cent. of its vitality in England. As to the commonality Mr. Wyndham Lewis says: "And it is just the popularization and vulgarizing of art that is responsible for the innumerable swarms of dilettante competitors who make of every art a trifling pastime, so that it is impossible for the rest of the world to regard that occupation as a serious one, seeing into what hands it has fallen. So it would certainly be the redemption of art, and it would no doubt have the effect of protecting, and actually of encouraging science, if they were both removed from the wide superficial, 'democratic' (that is aristocratic) playground, and reinstated as a mystery or a craft."

light of personal revelations. This reveals a certain weakness in the preceding plea, for the multiplicity of English words somewhat intersect each other, while French has fewer words and harder meanings, so that the languages may not be comparable; and then I am informed, our own language betrays an infantile ego-complex in those who use it as revealed by its unique use of the capital I, which may explain our Tennysons, Longfellows and racial ingenuousness.

Yet admitting that certain philosophic and even literary systems offer difficulties in languages other than their own, it seems to me that it would be an admirable thing if the writer here could develop a general

gallic level of excitement about literature, and substitute hard general standards for the sentimental preferences that to-day mark his choice; for they are not necessarily an inevitable penalty of English to-day.

In any case the agility I am asking for is not completely that of Donne, where having landed the reader may stand awhile, meditate, survey the prospect, nor that of Mr Pound, where the difficulty is one of 'locale' and the reader's ignorance, which deficiency in the reader notes might remedy; but I ask for a poet's agility where these qualities and others would be compounded, and in which the inspiration though necessarily drawn from human sources would transcend (?) them and become part of

some non-human world which is to be the delight of the inhabitants of the future.

It may be objected that the natural development of the artistic usages of to-day should fulfil these future needs, but the expression of nearly every mental activity is so circumscribed by traditional form, subject and accustomed reaction, and the accumulation of facts grown so vast in the last half century as to be unmanageable in this, that only some very complete break away seems to offer scope for an art which shall be adequate to the tremendous expansion which we feel the mechanical age has made flower within us. The artist's problem was simpler centuries ago when human activity was not so manifold, it was less simple at

a later date with "War and Peace." It is perhaps still possible for Mr Pound, whose cantos when completed may well prove to be the last epic between now and that mythical A.D. 3000; and no doubt some offspring of a still romantic and savage country, a Hamsun or Conrad, may find himself leading an adventurous life familiar therefore with some new unsuspected milieux, resulting for us in a lesser Odyssey; but that will become increasingly difficult with easy communication, the general rise in standards of living, levelling mediocrity, the woman's page, society photographs and all the vast hotel-de-luxe display of travelled sight-seeing and polite anecdotage.

As to birth and death, and the

whole butcher's shop of life which fills literature, the instinct by which a baby recognizes another baby at sight, or the deep interest of one human being in another of roughly the same size; the proper study of mankind being man and its setting apparently the nursery; mankind in any consistent world must assuredly violently react from a pre-occupation so strongly illumined by the psychology of Apes.

For we record it gladly: there has always been part of the community interested in the final elements of the emotions, their chemical formula if that were possible, and in ideas apart from their application; such an interest being not necessarily dependent on personal identifications.

Then, with the continual coming to consciousness of stratum upon stratum of each generation, Mr Cummings' ingenuity, and this was the Futurist process, and that of every artist whose method it is, or will be, to cut through his theme with the angles of curb-stones, street lamps, plate glass windows, all material objects and people, or bombard them with mathematical or astronomical dimensions; though superficially an innovation, is yet in essence identical with past practice—effects of landscape, weather or natural objects on the hero—and so is assured of a life co-existent with the rest of the arts.

And one asks oneself why the suggestion of such experiment as shall induce mental agility need sound so

particularly indecent in this country, as though such a quality were only appropriate to a frog-eating race; but without that there can be no progress and we shall continue to have our lonely Doughty's, colossal and incomparable figures, belonging to no time, no school, and on whose shoulders no super-structure can be raised.

VIII

Language and Material

But if we want a new literature and new arts we must have a new language and that was Mallarmè's pre-occupation. To establish a language that should never be commonplace and solid enough to serve as foundation for the whole of succeeding poetry. And this necessity to get away from the banal, and to say a thing once and for all (and no "compte rendu" of an emotional situation can do that) has always been and must continue to be the writer's pre-occupation. It is impossible now-a-

days to go on writing or even to put down once "At five o'clock the countess got back," or "sitting down she ordered a drink," there is no excuse for it. But as far as writing is concerned, it has been unable until now to dispense with these elementary bridges, and the fact that Dickens, Balzac, Tolstoi, our very great figures, did not bother about such trifles does not make the problem any less acute. For the problem of language and the significant, is essentially a modern hurdle the arts must clear before they can again get into their stride.

As for the writer's language we are seeking, and that others have sought, some shorthand of the emotions might possibly adumbrate not only the matter but the manner of the literature

of the year 3000. For we no longer doubt that every set of associations has some detonator and the problem now is how to establish that code, that form of literary cablegram which should be true for the greatest number, and because "toute âme est un nœud rhythmique." Thus our books would be much compressed, and simplified word endings and compound letters would take us back to the early Rolls. But again we should have to give up some of our economies, for the spacing of each work would become an important consideration. The waves of each explosion would be intersected by succeeding waves as a stone thrown into a pool makes a wave which succeeding stones cut at differing intervals with eccentric and rippling circles,

the intervening silences having all the importance of sound.

Or perhaps it is time humanity again turned to some method of time notation and the pointing of its syllables.

With so much insistence on sound and tempo and the general problems of synchronization it cannot be long before the clavilux is brought to perfection. The arts will begin to merge into each other, no distinguishing definition will remain valid for any of them, for a time all will sink into the welter of the countless millions of books, musical compositions and pictures the ages are busy piling about us.

And what indeed could be more disheartening than the adjoined catalogue of the junk of literature, and is

it possible to contemplate with equanimity the likelihood of this sort of thing continuing for another 1,000 years?

"Perturbations, anxieties, depravities, death, exceptions to the physical or moral order, the spirit of negation, stupors, hallucination served by the will, torments, destruction, surprise, tears, insatiabilities, subjections, racking thoughts, novels, the unexpected, things one should not do, the chemical singularities of the mysterious vulture who spies on the carrion of some dead illusion, precocious and abortive experiences, obscurities, the terrible monomanias of pride, the inoculations of profound astonishments, funeral orations, longings, betrayals, tyrannies, impieties, irritations, acrimonies,

aggressive outbursts, aberrations, melancholies, rationalized terrors, the strange disquiets which the reader will prefer not to experience, grimaces, phobias, the bloody drawplate through which logic at bay is made to pass, exaggerations, absence of sincerity, bores, platitudes, the gloomy, the lugubrious, births worse than murders, passions, the clan of assize court novelists, tragedies, odes, melodramas, extremes perpetually presented, reason hissed with impunity, cowardices, insipidities, frogs, octopuses, sharks, the desert simoom, what sleep-walks, is suspect, nocturnal, somniferous, night-walking, viscous, talking seal, equivocal, consumptive, spasmodic, aphrodisiac, anæmic, one-eyed, hermaphrodite, bastard, albino, per-

verted, aquarium phenomenon and whiskered woman; also, time drunk with silent discouragement, whims, tartnesses, monsters, demoralizing syllogisms, filth, what does not think like a child, desolation, the intellectual manchineel tree, perfumed sores, the thighs of (la dame aux) camellias, the guilt of a writer who rolls down the slope of nothingness and despises himself with joyful cries, remorse, hypocrisies, diffuse perspectives which crush you in their unperceived cogs, grave spewings over sacred axioms, vermin and their insinuating ticklings, idiotic prefaces like those to Cromwell. Mlle. de Maupin and of Dumas fils; decrepitudes, impotences, blasphemies, asphyxiations, stiflings, fits of rage; before these filthy charnel houses

which I blush to mention, it is time to react now against what shocks and utterly overwhelms us.

So we are left with Mallarmè's "A savoir s'il y'a lieu d'écrire."

And if this be applied to all the arts it is obvious that humanity must find some new universe of the spirit.

IX

A Helping Hand from the Sciences

But because the poet has not included scientific works in his catalogue, the reader is not to imagine that an oversight. Indeed he says somewhere: "O austere mathematics, I have not forgotten you since the days your learned lessons, sweeter than honey, trickled into my heart like a refreshing stream," and it is clear that for lucidity and scope, the possibilities of a mathematical work, with its exact symbols and paucity of units, whose permutations are endless, must be

unique. So we might hope that the impoverishment of the language which we see from day to day were a conscious process, ultimately to enrich us, but alas, words are too near their users and grow casual as they do, though indeed the repercussion may be mutual. For the error of that Sir Thomas Elyot who in 1533 (I quote from Ogden & Richards' *Meaning of Meaning*) intended "to augment our English tongue whereby men should express more abundantly the thing they conceived in their hearts," is all too common.

But if the writer's training gave him command of an exact language, either analytic or abstract, a suggestion of this kind would be unnecessary, but since as a rule he is profoundly ignor-

ant of what he is doing and how he does it, any likelihood of his development of a richer, more adequate and significant language, would seem to lie in the remotest future.

And since the sciences do not concern themselves with the overtones, irrelevancies even (unless Newton's apple be so called) which are at once the accidents and beauties of writing (as indeed of all the arts) but also its confession of failure, the sciences alone can help us to the living and stable form we desire. For where the pre-occupation is not with limiting primitive impulses and reactions, the increase of workers can only carry further the sublime literature of the higher dimensions. As to writing one may safely say that no writer benefits

by the discoveries of his predecessors (unless it be by the richer consciousness of his time) and so he must watch his scientific brother scaling the peaks of microns and parsecs upon the shoulders of his fore-runners while he himself must linger with the sirens.[1]

Are the sirens then his sympathetic nervous system as Mr D. H. Lawrence would have us believe (fixed as far as we are concerned, but minutely changing); and his intuitions which in the end make the quality of his writing, functions of the same system.

[1] Tchekhov says in one of his stories: "As I yield up my last breath I shall still believe that science is the most important, the most splendid, the most essential thing in the life of man; that it always has been and will be the highest manifestation of love and that only by means of it will man conquer himself and nature."

Certain writers, among them very consciously Mr Lawrence, do seem to reach out to their prey and store the answering vibrations as radium emanations are stored. And it may be we are wrong in asking our writer to think clearly, be mathematically conscious and able to turn on at will the elements he makes use of. But the fullest consciousness of himself is not incompatible with his own stable harmony, though this kind of scientific help cannot be of much use to him:

". . . to the student of the internal secretions, the lines, expressions, attitudes are important for they tell of the state of tensions and strains in the vegetative apparatus with which they are inseparably connected. It is when he comes to the consideration

of the face as a complex of brows, eyes, nose, lips, and jaws that he becomes most interested. For in the modelling and tone of every one of the features each of the endocrine glands has something to say."

But because we no longer need medicine-men or seers, and because our instruments and text-books will give us the same article with less fuss and more precision, can we not leave the intuitions for a bit and ask our writer or artist to be less bewildered by the forces which he uses, or prefers to think use him? Then he might endeavour to establish some set of constants on which to base his work and its possible developments, one advantage of schools being that before their theories are discarded, they have

been so thoroughly worn as to be threadbare. In that way some consecutive effort might be born. Baudelaire's offer to teach poetry in thirty lessons is a perfectly sound and above board offer, for in this art as in others, apprenticeship plays a most important part and more can be done with properly directed average intelligences than the average intelligence imagines.

That might bring us to our priesthood, our families of artists under the very few deans who have tried to formulate an æsthetic of their art.

X

A New Story-teller

In the meantime and while awaiting that series of concerted efforts which is to push back the limits of the universe and extend man's consciousness (though regrettably only on accustomed lines, but with wider scope if he will only consent to let go the life line of his fellows) we might make a very determined cast back to the past, particularly when it is as perfectly done as by Roussel. Here is *The House that Jack Built*, and Hans Andersen, and *The Arabian Nights*, but the version is modern (let us call

it that). The structure is infinitely rich and its elements, drawn from the remotest sources, documented to the last atom. This story of the scientist in his lonely wood with his extraordinary inventions, takes us with every dramatic and curious detail through a host of incidents like the tanks of an aquarium one has watched for years, or like those other tanks of air where in the late Madame Tussaud the young man hurried down the road to ruin.

I cannot conceive that humanity, much as it may change and russianize, will move very far from this literature or be able to give up its story tellers. Let us hope that with Roussel, who now after the lapse of centuries seems again to combine in himself all

the qualities of a tribal consciousness and the elements by which epics like *The Arabian Nights* grow or agglomerate, that the story is about to come into its own again and the marvellous, ousted by science and invention, become once more part of our lives. For what was capable of going into a formula seemed no longer marvellous to us.

XI

Conclusion

To recapitulate; posterity must choose from the various tendencies in writing which we have looked at, if it does not want them all; for we cannot postulate any real change in its make up or any ability to handle its material more consciously than we do, except in so far as it may drill into itself. This we do expect to reach a phenomenal degree of complication, with always however the saving clause as to the possible exploiting of the non-human and abstract image.

In any case, the general despair of

our young men, apart from its being a post-war despair, plus the deceptions which attend upon the age of 30, seems to me a genuine russianization and no robust

en l'an trentiesme de mon aage?
que toutes mes hontes j'ay bues

can be expected to-day.

As for the various forms already mentioned, the free association of words and ideas, first exploited seriously by Marinetti, has always existed as part of the properties of words and of the life they have in our minds and the habit they have of writing themselves when the mind is preoccupied and the hand holds a pen. This revelatory apparatus was applied by Freud. It is an important function of the mind and does not deserve the scorn

it has met, since most mature minds will find a sentence more easily than the 'mot juste' or even a single word. And then it is a mistake to think of words as counters, they are rarely that, but generally the button which releases a sentence or an elaborate idea. But our russianization is making us more receptive, the mind already reacts more quickly to words and their content, and we shall turn from the ungrateful method of Miss Stein, who means words to be words only and to mean nothing but what she would have them mean.

And then as antithesis we have the complicated grammatical structure I quoted from Mr Cummings which seems infinitely more suitable a form for posterity, and of which Mr

Joyce's [1] last jocular and Rabelaisian manner is an almost bewildering example, yet both allied by that 'Unan-

[1] . . . So much so that young Master Shemmy at the very dawn of history seeing himself such and such, when playing with words in his garden nursery, asked of all his little brothers and sweestureens the first riddle of the universe; when is a man not a man?; telling them take their time and wait till the tide stops (for whom from the first his day was a fortnight) and offering the prize of a bittersweet crab to the winner. One said when the heavens are quakers, a second said when Bohemeand lips, a third said when he, no, when hold hard a jiffy, when he was a gnawstick and detarmined to, the next one said when the angel of death kicks the bucket of life, still another said when the wine is wife, and still another when lovely woman stoops to conk him, one of the littlest said me, me, Sem, when pappa papared the harbour, still one said when you are old I'm grey fall full of sleep, and still another when wee deader walkner, and another when he is just only after having been semisized, another when yea, he hath no mananas, and one when dose pigs they begin now that they will flies up intil the looft. All were wrong, so Shem himself took the cake, the correct solution being, all give it up?—When he is a Sham.

imisme' which must go on through the ages.

As for calligrams, abracadabra spells, charms of all kinds, we like them and no doubt posterity will like them too. But the elements in the composition are so simple that it must always be repetitive, and any variation unimportant, at whatever point of the future resuscitated.

With the prophetic we come to Dostoievsky, about whom we cannot help hoping that his particular hysteria finds its limit in him. That, however, is unlikely; his characters do exist, will go on existing, will become continually more complicated. Nor do we want to change them, nor could we. It is only by an important effort that

we realize what hordes of people the world contains; how little the writer knows of any of them and how infinitely thin is the film under his microscope.

So let us have our Dostoievsky and with that everything; for through him we have the *Faits Divers* (Ivan and his newspaper cuttings), the dreams of children, the hypnogogic visions of the night and of the madhouse.

Out of all this, for literature and the arts these possibilities of unlimited development emerge:

(1) The cerebrally prophetic, of which the opening quotation is a specimen and which at last seems to be becoming articulate and organized. It is susceptible of very rich develop-

ment and it alone seems able to bear the application of a scientific method and to contain a promise of ever more grandiose development in keeping with the destinies of mankind.

And (2) we have the Russians as the supreme registering instrument and masters of the art of capturing remote vibrations. This is the great slide down which writers and humanity will go on slipping as long as there are towns, education, civilization. Feeling, feeling forever and everlasting, feeling about oneself, others, the whole creation, and no possibility of avoiding it if one would. But with it will go the large comforting blanket which understands, and soaks up all the violence and ebullition. But the State will perhaps think better to erad-

icate so demoralizing a preoccupation or a natural disgust will fling humanity into my first alternative.

So finally resuming, it seems to me we have on the one hand, Blake, Mallarmè, Roussel and the development of all those qualities we have called mental agility, the consciously prophetic, and so the consciously sublime, and then there is the sublimity of the bowels as in Tchekhov and Dostoievsky. The former will climb higher, its sweep grow more daring, the latter dig monstrously and fatally in before it finally disappears from the human stage or is merged into my first alternative, but both to become creatures whose splendour is to-day undreamed of.

As for what we called Futurism,

that cannot exist, for if it is at all vital it must become part of the tradition of posterity despite its momentary envelope for to-morrow to-day is yesterday. For Futurism is a dress and not a quality of the soul, and what is good in it may be found scattered through the ages. But the skeleton of the arts had so long been buried under a mush of traditional and effete forms that only some violent effort such as we have lately seen could disengage it, yet that effort must often be repeated in the time to come. What is new to humanity is the belated consciousness of its increasing sensibility. This may, nay must, reach some inconceivable degree, but only when, to our minds of to-day, it has grown utterly artificial.

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